

PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Kallu's world 3 - Mangu Mali and the Ambia Bhoot

Author: Subhadra Sen Gupta
Illustrator: Tapas Guha

Level 4



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

"There she is!" Kallu pointed down the lane.

"Why is she so late today? Something must have happened in school," his younger brother Shabbo added worriedly.

They had returned from school much earlier but their sister Munia was still not home, so lunch had to wait. As Munia came closer walking very slowly, dragging her school bag behind her, they noticed the flushed cheeks and the fiery glitter in her eyes.

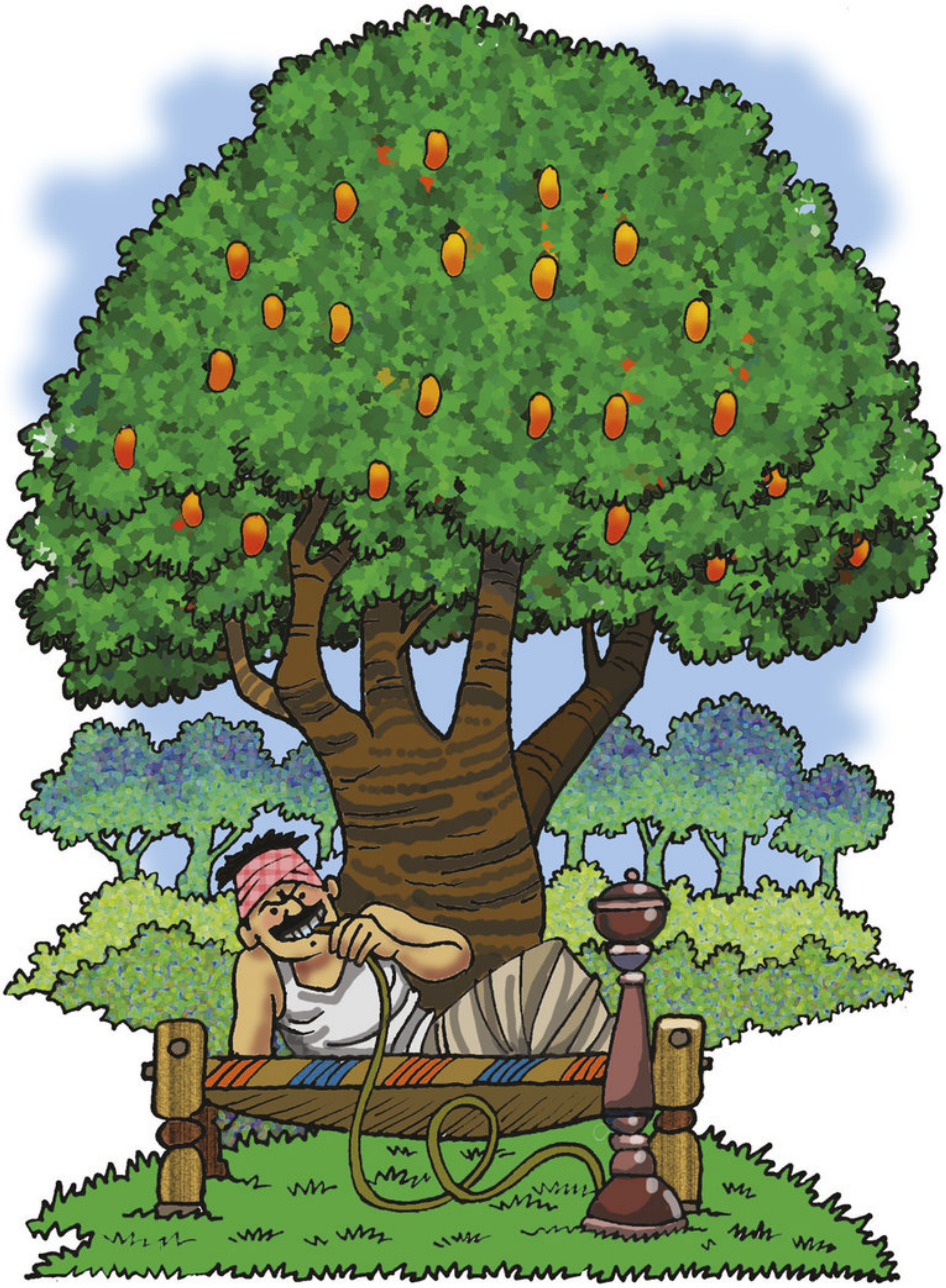


"Oye! She’s angry about something!" Kallu mumbled under his breath and then turned to stare at Shabbo, "Did you say something to her?"
"Noooo… I don’t think so…" Shabbo blinked nervously. "Did you?"
"Never! Are you mad?"

Everyone in the village of Khajuria knew about Munia’s hot temper. It was that famous. She did not lose it easily but when she did… baap re! Everyone knew about it really fast!



According to Kallu when Munia was angry, the street dogs hid behind trees and the crows flew away to the next village. And now looking at her glittering eyes, he knew something had got her burning again. So he and Shabbo watched her very, very carefully as she marched into the house, muttering something under her breath.



"That stupid man... sitting there like a nawab or something on his stupid charpai… who does he think he is?"

"Who?” Kallu asked very carefully.

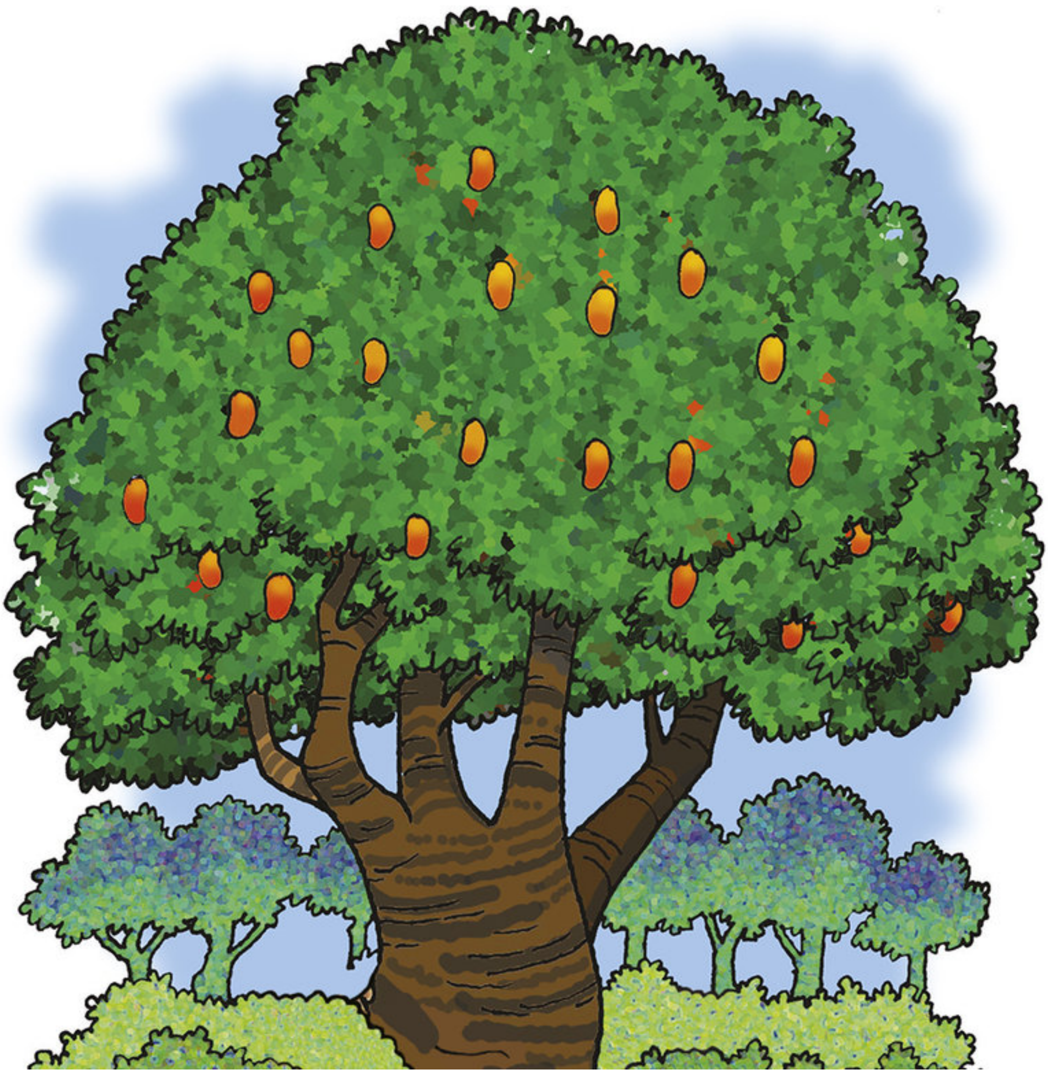
"You wouldn’t understand. You’re too stupid!"

"Theek hai," he said meekly and followed her inside. You did not argue unnecessarily with Munia when she was in this dangerous mood. Once, when she was mad at their mother for making her cook, Kallu had tried to joke about it and she had whipped around and tried to bite him. Luckily, she only got a mouthful of his kurta, but with a quick toss of her head, she had torn off a piece!

Kallu told his friend Damu that if she had actually drawn blood, he would have had to take injections like they do for dog bite. And when Munia heard what he had said, she threatened to bite him again.

So who was this nawab on a charpai, Kallu wondered as he helped himself to another parantha. Who in the whole village had the suicidal courage to make Munia angry?

The story came out during lunch after a few bites of parantha and vegetable had calmed Munia down.



"One day…" she said chewing away, “Mangu Mali’s precious tree will be struck by lightning… just you wait and see. I’ve cursed it today!"

"Aaah!" said Kallu and Shabbo together, everything was explained. "You tried to get a mango again!!"

"Just one mango… I really begged you know… just the tiniest, smallest one.” Munia shook her head. "And again he said…"

"Come and get it from the Ambia Bhoot!" Kallu and Shabbo said together.

Everyone in Khajuria knew that the sweetest, juiciest, mangoes in the whole district grew on the tree in the corner of Mangu Mali’s orchard. Every summer, the branches would droop with large, pale-green-and lemon coloured Dussehri mangoes, with that heavenly flavour that you could smell from far away. The problem was that Mangu would never allow anyone near his tree. And letting you taste a slice of a mango? Forget it!

All day he sat on his charpai, smoking his hookah right in the shade of the tree and what was worse, he would look at the children, give his crooked smile behind his moustache and say, "No one can steal my mangoes. All day I guard my tree, and all night I leave it to the Ambia Bhoot, the ghost of the mango tree."

Then he would take a drag at his hookah, cough and laugh nastily showing his large yellow teeth, "If anyone has the courage to face the deadly Ambia Bhoot and steal any mangoes, he can have them for free, heh heh!"

For years, all the kids in the village had dreamed of tasting a mango from the ‘bhoot tree’ but every mango-stealing expedition had failed. No one had ever met the Ambia Bhoot but somehow Mangu Mali seemed to read their minds. Every time anyone crept into the orchard, there he was, waiting in the shadow of that dark leafy tree, smiling nastily behind his moustache.

This time Mangu Mali had made a mistake. He had challenged Munia and her gang. Their gang included Kallu and his best friend Damu, studying in class nine.

Kallu’s sister Munia and Damu’s sister Saru were both in class eight and Shabbo the youngest was in class seven. In the school register, Kallu was Kallan, Damu was Damodar, Munia was Munira, Saru was Saraswati and Shabbo was Shabbir, but even Masterji often forgot their real names.

They were determined to get mangoes from the ‘bhoot tree’, as Damu called it. Only the prospect of a ghostly attack by Ambia Bhoot made them rather nervous. But they had taken Mangu Mali’s insults long enough and were determined that this summer, they had to defeat the Ambia Bhoot. As Saru said, their reputation as 'champion mango stealers' was at stake.
According to Mangu Mali, the Ambia Bhoot lived right there among those dark leafy branches. All day while Mangu Mali sat under the tree on his charpai, Ambia Bhoot slept somewhere out of sight. But all night, he could be heard moving from branch to branch making these horrible, hissing and gargling noises and counting the mangoes.



And he got very, very angry if he found that any mango was missing. Then, if he caught anyone trying to steal his mangoes, he attacked them by turning into coils of poisonous smoke that strangled the thief to death!

Mangu Mali said no one could be so brave or so stupid to face the terrible Ambia Bhoot and stay alive. And that was why he slept peacefully in his bed every night because he knew that no one could ever get those mangoes for free.

That evening, the gang meeting was held at the run-down pillared hall behind the temple. Once upon a time, this open hall was a sort of village clubhouse where people met in the evenings to chat. But nowadays all the men preferred to gather at Dharampal's chai shop, sipping tea in tiny glasses and munching his hot samosas and pakoras. So Kallu and his gang had taken over the hall and Saru and Shabbo had even painted some crazy pictures on one wall.

They all knew it was going to be quite a challenge.

It was the toughest mango stealing expedition they had ever planned, and the enemies were very powerful. After all, to fool both Mangu Mali and the dangerous Ambia Bhoot was no joke! So they planned the whole expedition very, very carefully.

"I’ve read somewhere that ghosts hate to come out in the moonlight," Kallu said. "So we’ll go tomorrow night when it’s full moon."

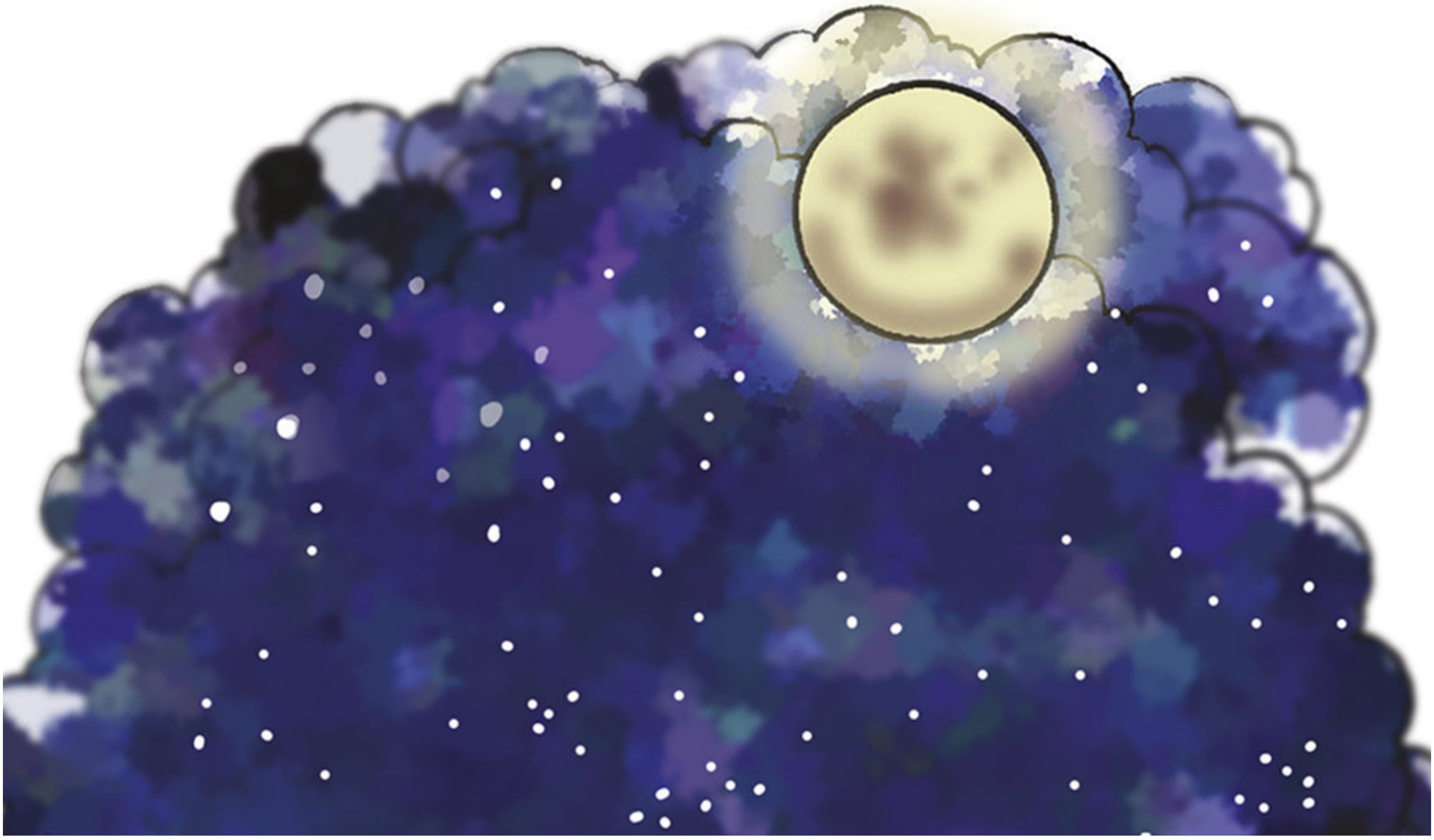
"And I’ll carry some garlic," said Damu. "A mango bhoot used to the heavenly aroma of Dussehris would hate the smell."

"There must be some special bhoot prayers," Saru wondered thoughtfully, "may be Moti Dadi would know some, I’ll ask her."

Moti Dadi was Damu and Saru’s grandmother and she was always making dark brown, horrible-tasting potions for coughs and stomach aches. So if anyone knew about anti-bhoot mantras, it would be her.

"Do you think I should carry my lucky marble?" Shabbo asked a little nervously. "It helps me during the maths tests."

"Garlic? Marble? Hah!! I’ll carry my biggest stick,” said Munia grimly.



"Stick? What for?" they all asked together.

"If the moonlight, prayers, marble and the garlic don’t work," said Munia with a steely glitter in her eyes, "I’ll beat the silly bhoot to a pulp."

"Don’t be silly!" laughed Kallu, "a bhoot is like a smoky cloud with sharp teeth and lo..o..ong, pointy nails. You can’t beat up a bhoot, Munia." Munia gave a superior sniff, swung her pigtails and walked away.

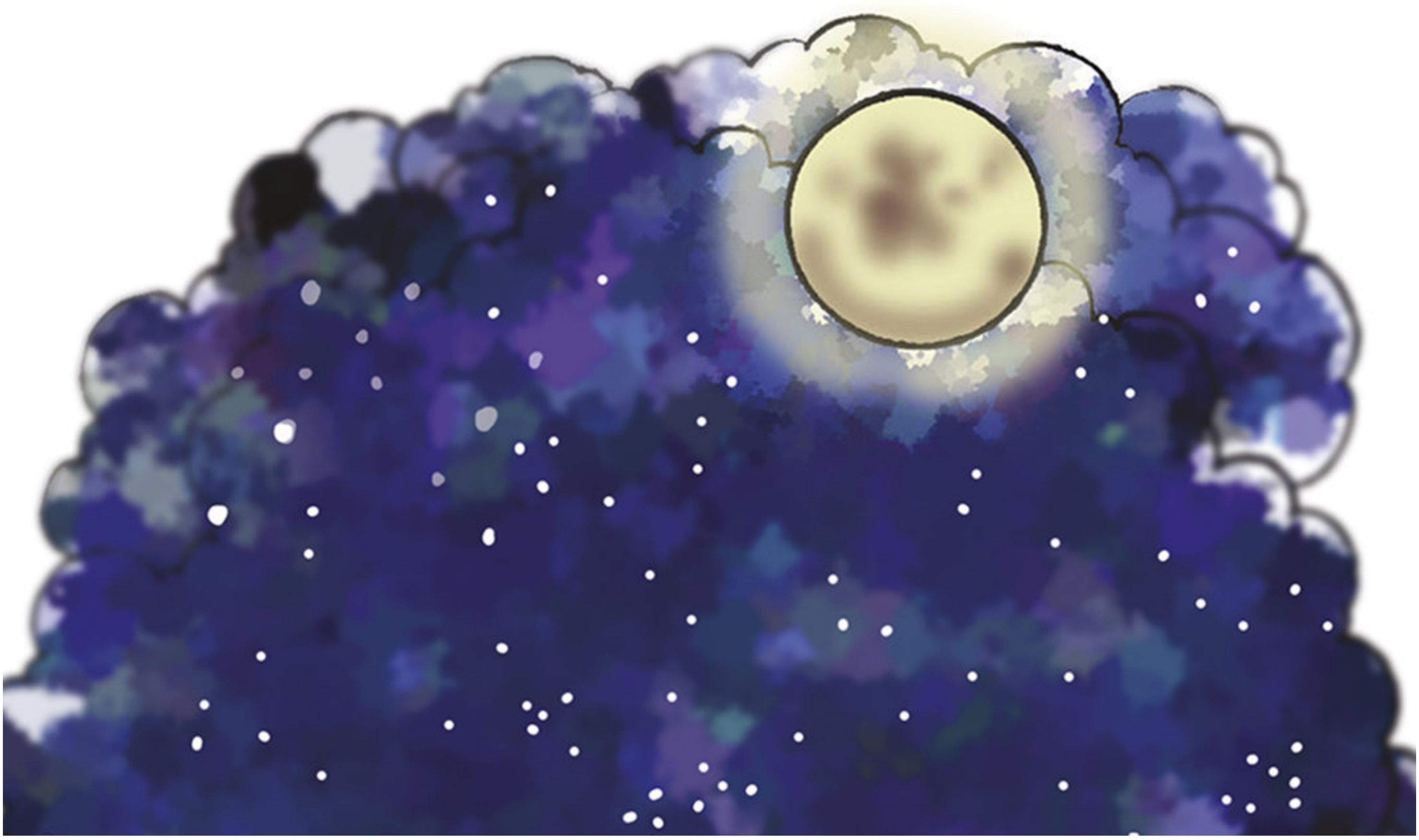


That night they waited until everyone was asleep and then crept out of their beds and tiptoed towards the orchard. Kallu looked up at the bright moon and sighed in relief. Damu’s kurta pocket had a handful of garlic, while Saru was trying to remember that really 'tried-and-tested' anti-bhoot prayer that Moti Dadi had taught her.



Shabbo, who had forgotten to bring his magic marble was already in a panic, and ready to run the moment the Ambia Bhoot appeared.

Munia took a deep breath and clutched the thick bamboo stick that she used when taking the goats to graze in the fields. As they moved swiftly through the orchard, they kept a sharp ear for Mangu Mali who slept in his small house across the nullah. The house was dark and Mangu Mali was clearly asleep.



Hearts thudding, they crept towards the ‘bhoot tree’. Getting closer, they listened carefully. The orchard was bathed in silvery moonlight with patches of looming shadows and it was absolutely silent. Except for the drone of the mosquitoes around their heads, not even a bird called or a bat flew about.

The silence was really scary. Where was Ambia Bhoot?

Obviously he wasn’t counting his mangoes tonight or you’d have heard him slithering around the branches, hissing, "Ek… do… teen… pandrah…"

Kallu was the best tree climber among them and he specialized in mango trees. So the plan was that he’d climb up, quickly pick a few mangoes from the lower branches, drop them to Munia and Damu waiting below and slide down fast before Ambia Bhoot could spot him. Saru was stationed at the gate of the mango orchard keeping watch, and was going to whistle if she saw Mangu Mali come out of his house. And Shabbo just hung at the back, his knees shaking, ready to run.

Catching hold of the lower branches, Kallu clambered quickly to the nearest branch that was laden with mangoes. Then just as he reached out to break a fruit, there was a funny thin cough from above and a hissing voice came floating down, "Who’s there? Who’s that? Who’s thaaaat?"



Kallu froze, as below the tree Damu carefully reached into his pocket, pulled out the garlic and waved it in the air.

"Go away! Go awaaay!!" hissed Ambia Bhoot, as Kallu crouched on the branch ready to spring down, "I am coming… I am coming…"

"Kallu! Are you alive?" quavered Damu from below.

"I will get you! I will get you!!" hissed Ambia Bhoot, making these weird gargling noises. Munia clutched her stick harder, looked up into the dark branches and asked, "Why do you repeat yourself like that, Ambia Bhoot? We’re not deaf!"

There was a surprised silence from Ambia and then with a crackling of branches, a scary, grey-white thing came slipping quickly down the tree, making these horrible groaning noises, "I’ll eat you! I’ll eat you!!"

"RUN!!!" yelled Damu and instantly Shabbo and Saru streaked out of the orchard at super speed and headed for home. Damu, about to follow them, turned and tripped over a hole in the ground, and went sprawling to the ground and lay there all dazed and breathless.

Kallu slid down the tree as fast as he could, dropping into a heap under the tree, leaving his chappals behind. Then as Ambia Bhoot’s sinister shadow got closer and closer, Kallu and Damu scrambled up and turned to flee.

"Munia!" yelled Damu. "RUN!!"

The dark, scary shadow, hissing, gargling and groaning was getting closer and closer… when Munia clenched her teeth, raised her big stick and hit Ambia Bhoot with a loud 'Thwack!' and then a 'Phataack!!'

"OW!" yelled Ambia in surprise, "OOOF!"

Kallu and Damu already halfway down the orchard slid to a halt in utter surprise. Who was that? Did Ambia Bhoot say, "Ooof!"?



Then Munia hit Ambia Bhoot again.

"Bachao!" yelled the voice of Mangu Mali as he scrambled down from the tree in panic and dropped the sheet he’d wrapped around himself. "Stop hitting me Munia. That hurts!"

"Now who’s the bhoot? Who’s the bhoot?" mimicked Munia, dancing around him in triumph, still waving her stick.

"Theek hai," said Mangu Mali with a cough. "You win! Pick some mangoes…"

"Pick some mangoes! Pick some mangoes!" repeated a grinning Munia, Kallu and Damu after him as they began to climb the tree.

"Saru and Shabbo ran away, did they?" asked Munia, busy picking mangoes. "They missed all the fun."

Story Attribution:

Other Credits:

'Kallu 03 - Mangu Mali and Ambia Bhoot' has been published on StoryWeaver by Pratham Books. The development of this book has been supported by P.A.N.I. Foundation. www.prathambooks.org

Illustration Attributions:

Illustration Attributions:

Page 20: Someone in a ghost costume, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2015. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 23: A girl hitting someone in a ghost costume with a stick, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2015. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Kallu's world 3 - Mangu Mali and the Ambia Bhoot
(English)

Welcome to Khajuria – a village where young Kallu and his gang run delightful adventurous riots almost everyday. Sometimes they question the village traditions, defy bullies or might just be going about their daily business but Kallu and his gang are up for anything. Join them as they grow wiser and wittier, happily roaming the village finding new things to do, and see what they come up with! Everybody in Khajuria knew about Munia's temper. Everybody also knew how stingy Mangu Mali was about giving away mangoes from the tree in his orchard. Now, Munia wanted mangoes...really badly and that too from Mangu Mali's orchard. Can you imagine a situation like this? Read on, to find out what happens...

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.